EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

NOVEMBER 21, 1997, 9:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

NORTHWEST POWER PLANNING COUNCIL OFFICES

PORTLAND, OREGON

I. Introductions and Review of Agenda.

William Stelle, National Marine Fisheries Service regional administrator, thanked everyone for coming, led a round of introductions and reviewed the agenda for today's meeting. A copy of the November 21 meeting agenda, together with a list of meeting participants, are attached as Enclosures A and B. The following is a distillation, not a verbatim transcript, of items discussed and decisions made at this meeting.

Please note that some of the enclosures referenced in these minutes may be too lengthy to routinely attach. To obtain copies of any of the enclosures from the November 21 meeting, please call Kathy Ceballos of NMFS at 503/230-5420.

II. 1999 MAJOR DECISION ACTIVITIES

A. NMFS Overview

Let me begin with a couple of general observations, Stelle said. As we heard at our last meeting, there are a number of significant analytical processes underway in the region. The PATH process is a collaborative effort between state, federal, tribal, public and non-public biologists and modelers who are trying to develop an understanding of how best to fashion some short- and long-term projections, on the biological side, of the performance of different long-term scenarios for the Columbia and Snake Rivers. We received a presentation on PATH's work from Dave Marmorek at our last meeting, and that work continues. Later this fall, said Stelle, we will be receiving some of the first results of that analysis for spring/summer chinook, with runs for fall chinook, steelhead et al. Due out in the spring and summer of 1998.

That is one very important piece, Stelle continued. Another important component of this analytical effort is the engineering and economic work that the Corps is doing in conjunction with the Independent Economic Analysis Board (IEAB). Another active effort is the Three Sovereigns process, in which we are all involved to some degree, he said -- I wanted to give you a brief update on the status of the government discussions underway through that process, said Stelle. Those governance discussions are trying to answer the general question of whether or not we can develop a better three-legged stool on which to rest the major decisions the region is fast approaching.

As most of you are aware, the Three Sovereigns process was born out of a series of meetings between the Governors of Oregon, Washington, Idaho and Montana, tribal representatives and

representatives from the various federal agencies, he continued. A Three Sovereigns work group has been formed to specifically address the governance question; we have gone from a general discussion of governance to a more focused effort to develop a set of very specific operating guidelines that the region can agree to. My understanding, Stelle said, is that a drafting committee, comprised of attorneys representing each of the Three Sovereigns, has now been formed. That group met last week, and more meetings are scheduled for next week. The federal parties have made a huge effort to craft a specific, executable agreement that could lend a great deal of specificity to the general notion of a governance process, and I am hopeful that we can continue to make good progress with the states and tribes in perfecting those ideas, Stelle said.

From NMFS's perspective, it is very important that whatever mechanisms we agree to will have a good likelihood of success, that they do not overcommit us, and that they are workable, Stelle continued. We want these governance discussions to succeed, but to succeed, they have to be practical and workable. The Governors are scheduled to meet again in Mid- January, and at least internally, we have been discussing the possibility that this January meeting could provide an opportunity for the tribal and federal sovereigns to the re-convene at the principal level to talk about whether or not we have been able to make some progress on the details of governance decision-making.

It's an ambitious schedule, and I'm not sure we will be able to deliver an executable MOA at that meeting, Stelle said. However, we are all working as hard as possible to make that a reality.

If we are able to reach an agreement among the tribes, the states and the federal government on a decision-making process, then, from my perspective, we can simply turn over our capabilities and staffing for the Regional Forum process into whatever new process is agreed to, Stelle continued. I think we all have to seek efficiencies, and we would all like to minimize the number of meetings we have to attend. To the extent that we are successful in crafting a new machine, I propose that we all take a look around the region and decide how many meetings and how many processes we can get rid of, he said. NMFS is completely open to the idea of securing additional efficiencies, and is optimistic that we can do so.

How closely connected are the PATH and DREW processes? asked Joyce Cohen of the Northwest Power Planning Council -- my concern it is that we don't have a bifurcation when they come out with their different sets of biological impacts. The two processes are fully connected, replied Brian Brown of NMFS. Doug Arndt of COE added that the biological studies associated with anadromous fish are being done through the PATH process.

I wanted to mention that Idaho has also been working on a process that we would like to see incorporated into the Three Sovereigns governance discussions, said Mike Field of the Council. It should also be mentioned that the tribes to have agreed to send a representative body and to this coordination effort -- I think that's a significant step forward, which should be acknowledged by this body. I agree, Stelle said.

B. Report from the Decision Process Coordinating Group (DPCG).

DPCG chairman Ed Sheets provided a briefing on his group's progress toward developing a process for making the 1999 decision, putting up a series of overheads, covering schedule, the background for the DPCG's efforts, work products to date, scope, various performance measures

and decision criteria that have been developed, an overview of the alternative scenarios that are currently under investigation, the connections between the DPCG and PATH, information needs and next steps. Sheets's overheads are reproduced in Enclosure C; please see this document for details of Sheets's presentation.

Who are the members of the DPCG committee? asked Rob Walton of the Public Power Council. It is made up of representatives from the Implementation Team, from PATH and from various federal, state and tribal entities, Sheets replied. And it is under the direction of NMFS? Field asked. Essentially, yes, Sheets replied.

Moving on, Sheets said the DPCG had considered various goals before reaching consensus that the Columbia Basin Fish and Wildlife Authority goal best captures the themes inherent in those other objectives:

"Restore sustainable, naturally producing fish and wildlife populations to support tribal and non-tribal harvest and cultural and economic practices. This goal will be achieved by restoring the biological integrity and the genetic diversity of the Columbia River ecosystem and through other measures that are compatible with naturally-producing fish and wildlife populations."

Another issue we have been grappling with is the scope of this effort, Sheets continued. If we can get regional agreement on what the goal should be, we thought it would also be very useful to try to get regional agreement on what the scope of the decision should be. The goal of the Corps's Lower Snake Feasibility Study is pretty narrow -- it is focused on the four Lower Snake projects, and on the listed stocks in the Snake River. One issue we have been discussing is whether or not the scope should be broader; there appears to be a great deal of interest in a broader scope. Our tentative recommendation at this point is that the scope should be, "Which hydro action, consistent with the goal, should be taken to protect ESA stocks?" That means all ESA stocks, including the recently-listed Columbia River stocks, plus resident fish and wildlife stocks.

Will your analysis of smolt-to-adult returns and survival to spawning be tied to a specific recovery technique? asked Field. PATH has looked at a lot of the historical information for spring and summer chinook, Sheets replied; their interim target is that, in the past, when the spring and summer chinook runs in the Snake River were healthy, they had smolt-to-adult return rates in the range of 2%-6%. One of the attributes and we'd want to look at is, what kind of smolt-to-adult return rates can each of the alternatives be expected to provide? If a given alternative looks like it will improve smolt-to-adult survival to the 2%-6% range, that would be an indication that we would be getting the same level of adult returns that were the rule when these stocks were in good shape.

Actually, I was thinking more in terms of how that information will be linked to flow, temperature, hatchery production -- will it be detailed and specific, or more general? Field asked. It will be possible to get to that level of detail, replied Tom Cooney of WDFW. The PATH group is trying to look objectively at how different combinations of those variables affect smolt-to-adult survival -- what are the major hypotheses that are out there about those relationships. Our goal is to present information in an organized fashion against each of those major hypotheses, Cooney explained. If smolt-to-adult survival is dramatically affected by assumptions about flow and in-river survival, you will be able to see very clearly how those factors affect the results.

And you will also include the most recent PIT-tag data? Field asked. Absolutely, Cooney replied.

Will you also be looking at the stock-specific effects of temperature? asked Cohen. Because I think that's just as important as flow. To my knowledge, there is not a specific hypothesis related to temperature on the table this point, Cooney replied. There is a lot of ongoing work related to the biological effects of temperature, and it is quite possible that a temperature hypothesis will emerge from that work. There is certainly room for such a hypothesis in PATH, and it will likely come into play when we start looking in more detail at fall chinook.

Stelle made the point that there are data-based limits on what kind of quantitative comparison can be made based solely on temperature. To the extent that data may be available, he said, it can be plugged into the modeling effort. We know there is data around, Cohen said -- probably as much in that arena as there is in the general productivity arena. My point is simply that I hope we use all of the data we have available, she said. I'll pass that along to PATH, Sheets said.

Sheets moved on to a brief overview of some of the major competing hypotheses for the listed stocks' decline. Lionel Boyer of the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes observed that many of these ideas have been under active discussion since 1995; the Water Equity Team is talking about them right now, he said. Various agencies, including CBFWA, have been working on this for some time now. I think that's true in part, Stelle replied. However, I think what Ed is trying to describe is what analytical work is underway under the PATH process, which is work that has really not been done before. My point is, this is new stuff, and it is potentially quite powerful stuff -- it's aimed at resulting the different ideas within the region about what is really driving the system, so that we can develop a better and more reliable set of projections of what the biological outcomes of any particular alternative might be, Stelle said. While it is true that the Water Equity Team and CBFWA have examined different configurational and operational options for the hydropower system, and how those options and might affect the fish and wildlife resources in the basin, what we're describing here is a more quantitative way to express the outcomes of any given option, Stelle said.

My concern is that, while we are running these various analyses, we are fast depleting the recovery of the fish, Boyer said. Your own directive states that NMFS will carry out its responsibilities under the Endangered Species Act in a manner consistent with the federal trust responsibilities to the tribes. Those trust responsibilities strive to ensure that the Indian tribes do not bear a disproportionate burden for the conservation of listed species, and to avoid or minimize the potential for conflict and confrontation. We are fast getting to the point of conflict and confrontation, Boyer said, and I think it's time for NMFS to back up and start doing what it is supposed to be doing. That's a fair point, Stelle said -- it is related to the chart we have before us right now, which talks about what the decision criteria should be. Those criteria include not only biological performance measures, but what other objectives and obligations decision-makers have. Those other obligations include the ability about any particular option to satisfy trust and treaty obligations to the tribes and to Canada.

In response to a question from Ken Pedde of the Bureau of Reclamation, Stelle said the Water Equity Team (WET) was a group of fishery biologists and hydro experts, assembled by CBFWA several years ago to examine different operational and configurational options for the federal hydropower system over the short and long term for the purpose of achieving fish and wildlife recovery in the Columbia Basin. They looked at immediate, interim and long-term

configurational and operational changes in the Snake River and Columbia River systems to evaluate their effects on fish and wildlife stocks over the long term, Stelle said. It was an attempt to balance the trade-offs between various operational and configurational scenarios; the WET team developed a report in 1995 that expressed what those trade-offs were, and what preferences may exist for one scenario over another.

That report identifies one long-term alternative that meets the needs of both anadromous and resident fish, Boyer said. This alternative includes the drawdown of the four Lower Snake projects to natural river, and John Day to spillway crest; it stabilizes Grand Coulee elevation at eight feet above baseline from June through December, and meets the IRCs in storage reservoirs, which has substantial benefits for resident fish and recreation. This option uses no augmentation flows from Dworshak or Brownlee reservoirs, Boyer added; it uses up to 2.2 MAF from Arrow Reservoir in low water years.

I have a copy of the WET team's draft report, and would be happy to provide copies to anyone interested in reviewing it, said Stelle. The only thing I would add, said Sheets, is that that specific alternative, as well as several similar to it, are being evaluated in much more detail in terms of their biological and economic effects through our process.

Pat Ford of Save Our Wild Salmon said he has heard that there is some delay occurring in the PATH analysis; further, he has heard that there is substantial disagreement within PATH about some of the basic assumptions that lead to outcomes in the model. Can you tell us whether the PATH process is attempting to produce agreement on those basic assumptions, or whether we are headed once again toward two different assumption tracks? Ford asked.

First, it is true that PATH is a little behind schedule, Sheets said, although we do hope to see a draft spring/summer chinook report in December, and a more detailed draft report in March. In terms of assumptions, for at least some of those assumptions, there is agreement. For the assumptions on which there is disagreement, as they have run those through the models, the bottom line is, they have found that they don't make much difference in terms of outcome, Sheets said. As you're all aware, there are some different hypotheses about sources of mortality. We have been able to weed some of those out because they didn't fit very well with the data; however, some hypotheses seem important enough to warrant further analysis, and the models will be run using each of those alternative hypotheses. It's not clear to me that, at the end of this process, we will be able to say that we have eliminated all conflicting hypotheses and we know it exactly what is happening here. What we will be able to tell the decision-makers is, given the scientific uncertainty, these are the actions we think perform best no matter which basic hypotheses ultimately prove to be true.

And you expect the draft spring/summer chinook report, when it does come out, to illuminate where there is agreement about the basic assumptions, and where there is not? asked Ford. Yes, Sheets replied, and one of the most interesting things it will contain is the risk analysis, showing how robust various alternatives are to various hypotheses.

Sheets continued on to the various alternative scenarios that are currently being analyzed by PATH and the DPCG:

- Expanded Transportation -- maximizing the number of fish that are put in barges with the

system as it is currently configured

- Transportation Plus -- uses surface collectors and other technology in an effort to collect more fish and put them in barges.

- Snake River dams to natural river

- Snake River dams to natural river and John Day to spillway crest

- Snake River dams and John Day dam to natural river

- John Day dam to spillway crest

- John Day dam to natural river

- Maximum In-River Migration -- improved dam passage with the fish left to migrate in-river.

- Additional flow augmentation in the Snake and Columbia Rivers -- 1 MAF to 3 MAF from the Upper Snake, and an additional 3.5 MAF from the Columbia.

In response to a question from BPA's Alex Smith, Sheets said that all of these scenarios are being analyzed from a river operations and a biological standpoint. In terms of economic analysis and detailed engineering, we are looking at everything but John Day, he said -- we do not have authority, at this point, to do that sort of analysis for John Day, other than power system modeling.

In response to another question, Cooney said the risk analysis associated with this effort will be an attempt to assess the consequences of making a wrong decision -- if a decision is made on the basis of an alternative's response to a given hypothesis, but another hypothesis turns out to be true. Basically, this will be an attempt to lay out the risks associated with making different decisions, he explained. If there is time, there will also be a discussion of the value of gaining very specific additional information over a short period of time in order to narrow the risks of making a wrong decision.

If I can add to that, Stelle said, there are a number of different long-term scenarios that are being analyzed. We are doing a large number of modeling runs on each of those scenarios. The first thing we will get from that analysis is a display of the range of outcomes for all of those runs, for each of the scenarios -- this will help us identify where the mean of that range may fall. We will than have a sensitivity analysis for that outcome to each of the different hypotheses, Stelle explained -- to what degree does one particular theory about what is driving the system affect or not affect that range. It is less a risk analysis than a display of the range of outputs from the modeling for a given scenario, and of how sensitive the outcome of that scenario is to a particular hypothesis.

By the end of this month or thereabouts, we will have the first range of projections for spring/summer chinook, Stelle continued. It may well be that, at that point, we will want to spend some time with representatives from PATH going through those projections, so that we can really understand what they are telling us. At that point, we will have an opportunity to provide some feedback to PATH, and tell them whether or not this preliminary analysis looks as though

it will be helpful.

Sheets concluded his presentation with a discussion of the next steps in the decision process development. Cohen observed that, while both region is on course to make the recovery decision in 1999, we are running out of Biological Opinion authority. For the 1999 migration season, there will need to be some kind of regional agreement on whether operations for the 1999 season will be carried out under the old Biological Opinion, or whether there will need to be some kind of interim decision, she said. If we're talking about process, that's one of the things that needs to be on our radar screen.

One technical clarification, said Stelle -- it is not accurate to say that the Biological Opinion expires in 1998. It was intended to provide a set of recommendations to the operating agencies on the operation of the FCRPS, and on commitments that we would undertake in the interim, pending a decision on a longer-term remedy. The BiOp also articulates an expectation that we will be making decisions on those long-term remedies in 1999.

I have two main expectations, Stelle continued -- first, we are engaged in a consultation with the operating agencies, stimulated by the recent decision to list steelhead in the Upper Columbia. We need to get through that consultation in order to identify whether or not and to what degree adjustments to the chinook Biological Opinion may be necessary. Whatever the outcome of that consultation, my expectation is that the 1995 BiOp will not necessarily expire in 1998, Stelle said.

One general comment on the topic of what kind of mechanism we want to employ to select and implement a long-term remedy, Stelle continued -- obviously, that is something that is being discussed in detail in the Three Sovereigns process, and from my perspective, that is a completely appropriate subject for that forum. I hope that the outcome of those discussions is going to be greater clarity and a sense of the kind of decision process that we will be committing to as a region. At the same time, I have begun some discussions with the Power Planning Council about the rulemaking framework the Council is developing, he said, and possible modifications that are being contemplated to the Council's fish and wildlife program, in the context of our recovery planning processes, to explore ways in which those existing administrative mechanisms could be better coordinated to provide implementing conduits for the selection of a long-term remedy.

For the purposes of this process, let's assume that we will hear a presentation from Dave Marmorek of PATH some time early next year, as soon as that group has some work products for us to review, Stelle said.

C. BPA's Subscription Process and Fish and Wildlife Funding.

Smith said that BPA held a workshop earlier this week in Spokane in response to letters from the Administration and the Northwest Congressional delegation; the workshop's goal was to investigate the need for, and potential processes for the development of, a fish funding agreement. It was a productive workshop, which many of the people in this room attended. A good cross-section of Northwest interest groups were represented, including the tribes, federal agencies, Council members, environmental groups and BPA customers. Our intent was to have some meaningful discussions on both energy issues and environmental issues, and the

interrelationships between them, she explained. We are in the process of developing a written workshop summary; anyone who is interested in getting a copy should contact my office at 503/230-5136, Smith said. She added that another workshop session has been scheduled for Thursday afternoon, December 11 in Portland.

The other thing I wanted to mention, Smith continued, is that we held a meeting last week in Washington D.C. to brief various federal representatives on the current energy market situation, what the subscription process is all about and what kind of range we're looking at in terms of future fish and wildlife costs. Overall, I would say that people in Washington D.C. are very interested in what is happening here in the Northwest, and that they want to stay on top of the situation, Smith said.

Cohen added that a private-sector cost review group has also been formed to look in greater detail that what kinds of internal reshaping BPA can undertake, and to develop a quantitative estimate of cost savings over time. Their report is due out in January, she said. And do you have a fairly high decree of confidence that this will be a rigorous exercise? Stelle asked. Yes, Cohen replied. I would add that this group is also looking at Corps and Reclamation costs, said Pedde.

My only comment is that you should probably identify this effort as MOA II funding, Field said. If you don't call it MOA II funding, I'm afraid no one will know what you're talking about. The reason we stopped calling it MOA II is the fact that there are so many governance issues embedded in the MOA, Smith said. We didn't want to confuse this process with the Three Sovereigns governance discussions, and thought it would be better to refer to this as a discussion of fish funding alternatives. I understand that, but I think we've would be better off to simply identify it for what it is, said Field.

Another question, said Stelle -- the Transition Board has specifically articulated its expectation that somehow, somewhere, a package of recommendations will be developed that includes cost reduction, cost recovery (a.k.a. stranded costs) and fish and wildlife funding projections. That package is to be developed by the spring of next year, to enable us to display the future financial realities facing the FCRPS, and to enable BPA to enter power sales contract negotiations. Where do we currently stand on the issue of cost recovery?

That's a question that is on a lot of people's minds, Smith replied. The Three Sovereigns group has undertaken a fairly robust exploration of transition/recovery costs; there is also a customer group that is working on a series of proposals, and my understanding is that the Transition Board will be pulling this piece together. Actually, at yesterday's meeting, the customer group reported that they do not have a proposal on the table, and will not be developing such a proposal, said Sheets. As a result, the Transition Board is going to have to make a decision about how it wants to proceed. At the moment, however, there is no game plan as far as how to proceed with the stranded cost issue. Unless the customer group can reach consensus, it is going to the very difficult to move forward.

Sheets added that the Three Sovereigns staff has formed a workgroup to look at the issue of future fish and wildlife costs; another workgroup has been formed to look at the issue of cost recovery. These groups will be working with Fred Olney's group to determine future fish and wildlife costs; they will also use the Multi-Year Implementation Plan as a key input, and will be reviewing direct reimbursable capital and operations costs, as well as the cost reduction studies

BPA and the Council are working on. The goal is to develop potential cost recovery needs, some alternative cost recovery mechanisms, and to analyze the economic and legal issues. In terms of schedule, they hope to develop a proposal by March or April, Sheets said. In response to a question, Sheets said this proposal could focus on a cost recovery mechanism; and could also wrap in future fish and wildlife costs and potential BPA cost reductions.

D. Capital Construction.

1. 1998 Columbia River Fish Mitigation Program Adjustments Because of Reduced Appropriation.

Jim Ruff of the Power Planning Council staff distributed a handout (Enclosure D) showing the budget adjustments made by the System Configuration Team to the Corps's FY'98 capital construction program in response to the reduced FY'98 appropriation from Congress. The original dollar amount requested was nearly $127 million, said Ruff. What we actually received from Congress was approximately $95 million, which will be closer to $89.6 million once we factor in savings and slippage. In light of that reduced appropriation, the SCT was forced to make a number of adjustments to the capital construction program. These include:

- Work on the improvements to the Lower Granite juvenile bypass system was deferred, pending results from the FY'98 test separator evaluation.

- Funding for the Lower Granite surface bypass program was increased by $2.5 million for FY'98

- Funding for fish ladder temperature control at the four Lower Snake projects was deferred for FY'98; instead, data is being collected in 1998, and a prototype will be tested at one of the four projects next year.

- Ice Harbor flow detectors will be installed and completely operational on eight bays prior to the 1998 migration season.

- At McNary Dam, funding for the screen maintenance facility was deferred.

- At John Day Dam, construction of the smolt monitoring facility will be completed in FY'98 as will construction of the flow deflectors at that the project. Funding for surface bypass at that project was cut in half. Funding for the drawdown evaluation at John Day was cut from $3.2 million to $750,000.

- Funding for extended-length screens at John Day was one of the most contentious issues addressed by the SCT in FY'98; funds for this project have now been cut from $10 million to $4.4 million. Between three and six new screens will be constructed in 1998. This dollar amount will include monitoring and evaluation, as well as structural testing and engineering design changes to address some of the cracking problems that were seen in the prototype screen in 1997.

- Work on The Dalles surface bypass system was deferred for FY'98, because most SCT members felt that spill is the most effective passage route at that project, and surface because bypass work is ongoing at Lower Granite and will soon begin at Bonneville. Work on The Dalles juvenile bypass system was also deferred, because, again, we are relying on spill to provide

passage at The Dalles, Ruff said.

- At Bonneville dam, work on improvements to the Powerhouse II juvenile bypass system is going forward in FY'98. At Powerhouse I, we are completing engineering and design work on guidance improvements in FY'98 and expect to begin construction in FY 99. We are also moving forward with plans to do a surface bypass system prototype test at Powerhouse I, said Ruff.

- In terms of systemwide studies, gas abatement was scaled back considerably; the current plan calls for completing alternative evaluations in FY'98, but the design and construction of a prototype gas abatement structure has been deferred, as have the planned biological studies associated with this item.

- The turbine passage study funding was cut in half; acoustic technology was totally deferred.

- Funding for the Lower Snake feasibility study was increased.

- On the additional barges front, two new barges will be completed in FY 98.

The bottom line is, Congress cut our requested budget by more than $30 million, and we had to make some cuts, said Ruff. Some of those cuts were quite painful. If any additional funds do become available in FY'98, surface bypass at The Dalles will be the first project to which funding will be restored.

2. NPPC's Capital Construction Review and Implications.

Because there were a number of controversial projects in the FY'98 capital construction program, in the conference agreement language, the conferees requested that the Council, with assistance from the Independent Scientific Advisory Board, conduct a review of the major mitigation capital construction activities by June 30, 1998, said Ruff. The Council staff has held three scoping meetings to date, and discussed the review with the Council at its meeting in Spokane last week.

There will be four major elements to the capital construction review process, Ruff continued: how to scope and organize the review process, how to frame policy questions for the Council and scientific and technical questions for the ISAB, whether and how to conduct a post-ISAB review, and, finally, how the Council will draw overall conclusions from the ISAB science review, and how those conclusions will fit into the Council's amendment process, the 1999 system configuration decision and the annual prioritization process.

Ruff provided a brief summary of some of the major comments received during the scoping meetings to date:

- This review needs to be a bridge-builder for the region, to help build consensus on how to proceed with this program

- The Council, NMFS and the tribes need to work together on this review, identifying common objectives and using the Multi-Year Implementation Plan to provide direction

- The review needs to identify general principles for the ISAB review in cooperation with those members who will be conducting the review

- The review needs to look broadly at alternatives, and take a long-term viewpoint

- Many parties expressed interest in a detailed review of the controversial projects in the FY'98 program -- the Bonneville II bypass improvements and outflow relocation, the installation of extended-length screens at John Day dam and the surface bypass prototype test at Lower Granite dam.

- We need to develop agreed-upon criteria to aid in project selection and in screening mainstem passage projects and research efforts in future years

- Many parties suggested that the Council put sideboards on the ISAB scientific review -- that it would be useful to consider major system configuration alternatives to help frame their review.

- The lower river tribes would like to see water quality standards enforced and attained for both water temperature and total dissolved gas. The review should include the feasibility and expected costs and potential benefits of the Gas Abatement Program.

The first work product we will be producing for review is the draft scoping document, Ruff continued. This document will include, first, an overall goal and objectives for the review, the overall scope of the review, the schedule by which the review will be completed, and the questions to be addressed by both the Council and the ISAB. This draft scoping document is currently under development, and will be distributed for review very soon. Ruff also distributed a written summary of his presentation on this issue, which is attached as Enclosure E.

Our intent is to produce a draft work plan in time for presentation at the December Council meeting, and to present a final work plan at the January Council meeting, Ruff said. At that time, we will forward the scientific questions to the ISAB; they will have four months to accomplish their review, and will present results to the Council in May. The Council will then have until June 30 to seek public input, then produce its final report to Congress. As many of you are aware, there is also an artificial production review underway under the same schedule, said Ruff, so the Council's fish and wildlife staff is pretty well swamped at the moment.

Is there anything in your scoping document about Snake River sockeye? asked Boyer. The tribes want to be sure that sockeye do not fall off the table in this process. Actually, I believe this scoping work will cover any stocks that are impacted by the modifications included in the construction program, said Cohen. I hope the tribes plan to be involved in this process, because many of these investments will impact sockeye. We would like to be involved, Boyer replied, but we are not always notified when these scoping workshops are planned. Actually, I believe a member of the Sho-Ban staff was on the conference call at the meeting in Spokane, and provided comments, said Ruff. Also, Joyce is correct in saying that many of the fish passage improvements that we're working on at the Lower Snake projects will benefit spring/summer chinook, fall chinook, steelhead and sockeye.

Another comment regarding the ISAB review, said Boyer -- I think it would be appropriate for that group to consider the question of cultural resources, because that is something that needs to be considered in reference to cost etc.

III. Interim Measures to Improve Salmon Survival.

A. Review of 1997 Hydro Operations.

1. Physical Operations. TMT chairwoman Cindy Henriksen briefed the Executive Committee on some of the highlights of the 1997 physical operation of the FCRPS. Details of her presentation, including information on 1997 runoff volumes at various projects, seasonal average flows at Lower Granite and McNary dams, storage project operations and 1997 total dissolved gas information, can be found in Enclosure F. Some of the highlights included:

- 1997 was a record water year at many projects; for the January-July period, 1997 was the largest water year in the 60-year record at Lower Granite and The Dalles, and was the second-highest water year on record at Grand Coulee. Runoff volumes were 126% of normal at Libby, 139% of normal at Grand Coulee, 166% of normal at Lower Granite and 150% of normal at The Dalles in 1997

- On a seasonal average basis, the Biological Opinion flow targets were substantially exceeded at both Lower Granite and McNary dams during both the spring and summer periods. McNary, the observed spring seasonal average flow was 441 Kcfs, compared to a Biological Opinion objective for the April 20-June 30 period of 260 Kcfs.

- In an operation unique to 1997, Dworshak Reservoir was drafted to elevation 1500 feet by August 29 to accommodate grouting work at that project.

- Brownlee reservoir refilled to its full pool elevation -- 2077 feet -- on June 27, and remained at full pool through July 24,

- The Libby project supplied two sturgeon pulsing operations in 1997, and reached its highest elevation of 2455 feet on August 12 (four feet from full). A Libby/Arrow swap was initiated on Aug. 13; this resulted in an August 31 elevation of 2450 feet at Libby, nine feet from full. Despite this swap, Libby did not refill in 1997; this is due the fact that observed inflows for the April-August period at that project were lower than forecast inflows by 0.5 MAF -- a cool, dry July meant that the remaining snow pack in the Libby basin evaporated, rather than materializing as runoff, Henriksen said.

- The Hungry Horse project refilled to its top foot of elevation -- 3560 feet -- by July 22. It ended August at elevation 3546 feet, 14 feet from full.

- Grand Coulee refilled to elevation 1290 feet on July 14; it was drafted to elevation 1280 feet by August 31, 10 feet from full.

- Moving on to total dissolved gas information, Henriksen said that, at Ice Harbor Dam, historically, tailrace TDG levels have been in the 140% range during the April-July period. For the first time in 1997, there were four flow deflectors installed at Ice Harbor, and despite the fact that average 1997 flow levels at that project were about 30 Kcfs higher than they were in 1996, dissolved gas levels downstream of the project averaged about 130% -- 10 percentage points lower than they were in 1996. From this information, she said, it would appear that the flip-lips are doing their job.

- Dissolved gas levels below John Day Dam were very high in 1997, reaching 145% in late April and continuing above 140% through the end of June -- a reflection of the extremely high flow

and spill levels in 1997.

• The grouting operation at Dworshak is on schedule to be completed by December 15, Henriksen said.

In response to the question from Cohen, Henriksen said that there are now eight flow deflectors installed at Ice Harbor; flip-flip installation is also underway at John Day Dam. Two flow deflectors were installed at that project prior to the 1997 migration season, and work is underway even as we speak to get more installed prior to the 1998 migration season. In response to a question, Doug Arndt said that the Corps is on schedule to finish flow deflector construction at John Day in 1998 -- a total of 18 bays will have flow deflectors installed, although I can't promise that construction will be fully completed prior to the 1998 migration season, he said.

I guess the take-home message it is that 1997 was a very good year from a water availability standpoint, said Brian Brown. There were a couple of additional points I wanted to draw attention to -- first, that the flip-lips that we have installed to date at Ice Harbor and John Day appear to be exceeding our expectations in terms of gas abatement. Also, while the seasonal flow objectives identified in the Biological Opinion were substantially exceeded in 1997, the summer BiOp flow objective at Lower Granite was not met during the last two weeks of August. We will discuss the reasons why later in today's agenda -- there were some opportunities that we could have capitalized on, and we would like to be in a better position to capitalize on similar opportunities in the future.

2. Upper Snake River Accounting. This item was addressed later in today's meeting.

3. Biological Monitoring. Michelle DeHart of the Fish Passage Center provided a briefing on results from the 1997 biological monitoring season. Among her main points:

• In 1997, flood control operations, rather than Biological Opinion operations, determined most of the fish passage conditions that occurred during the spring period.

• There were water volumes available that would have allowed system managers to meet the BiOp flow targets on a daily basis throughout the spring and summer periods; however, a series of constraints precluded the project managers from moving available flood control volumes from the Upper Snake down to Lower Granite during the August period.

• The high flow year pushed travel time for subyearling migrants to very close to that of yearling migrants, and we had an opportunity to collect that data in 1997, said DeHart.

• The incidence of gas bubble trauma in the biological monitoring program exceeded the NMFS criteria only when TDG levels exceeded 130% on average.

• Daily average flows were below the BiOp targets at Lower Granite during the last four weeks of August, and during the last week of August at McNary.

• Spill in 1997 exceeded the levels and duration that occurred in 1996; the flood control requirements that determined the operation in 1997 allowed us to come pretty close to the the 80% fish passage efficiency in the BiOp during the spring period at many projects, said DeHart. Despite the decline in summer flows and fish passage efficiencies, we did the best we've ever

done in 1997 in terms of meeting the BiOp fish passage efficiencies, she added.

• As was observed in 1996, the symptoms of dissolved gas trauma increased when dissolved gas levels increased. This increased our confidence that the biological monitoring program is accurately reflecting what is really happening in the river, said DeHart.

• The biological monitoring criteria in the NMFS monitoring plan were exceeded on 25 occasions in 1997, DeHart said. Those criteria were exceeded 23 times in 1996, and were never exceeded in 1995. The key thing to remember it is that every time we exceeded the criterion in 1997, it was during a period of uncontrolled flow and spill, and there was really no action we could take to change that condition, said DeHart. Operationally, I think we were doing everything we could to minimize those flow and spill levels.

• Of all the fish examined for signs of gas bubble trauma in 1997 -- more than 50,000 in all -- only 4.9% actually had symptoms. The vast majority of those had minor symptoms. The highest incidence of symptoms occurred below Bonneville Dam during the period of highest uncontrolled spill at John Day.

• Moving on to passage period, DeHart said that juvenile passage at Lower Granite started a week earlier than normal and ended at the normal passage end point-- in other words, the duration was longer in 1997. At Rock Island Dam, passage started later for chinook and sockeye, and earlier for steelhead. However, looking at passage timing from a global perspective, we think this change in timing is mainly a reflection of change in the composition and timing of releases from the Mid-Columbia hatcheries, DeHart said.

• The passage index for wild yearling chinook at Lower Granite was only 18% of the previous four-year average -- this is certainly not good news, said DeHart, but it wasn't unexpected, based on the low adult returns we've seen in the past few years.

• At Rock Island Dam, on the other hand, the passage indices were higher than the previous four-year average. This is especially interesting because hatchery releases to this system were actually smaller than they have been in recent years, said DeHart. We are still investigating what may have caused this increase.

• Higher flows in 1997 generally translated into faster travel times.

I wanted to highlight a few of the issues I anticipate that we will be dealing with, primarily at IT and, potentially in this forum as well, next year, said Brown. One of those issues has to do with the gas bubble disease monitoring that was done in 1997 -- as Michelle said, we saw exceedance of the biological criteria contained in the NMFS monitoring plan at dissolved gas levels above 130%. The Dissolved Gas Team is doing a comprehensive review of the data that have been collected in the last few years, to help us evaluate whether or not the monitoring program is adequate to protect migrating salmonids.

On the transportation front in 1997, said Brown, we were attempting to manage to a 50% to 60% target range; our final transportation estimates show that between 50% and 64% of the juvenile migrants were transported in 1997, depending on stock. We anticipate that transportation program will continue to be a controversial element in the 1998 management plan.

4. Survival Estimates. Steve Smith of NMFS provided an overview of some of the biological research data collected in 1997; he went through a series of overheads, which are reproduced in Enclosure G. Please see this enclosure for details of Smith's presentation; some of the highlights of this talk included:

• For PIT-tagged yearling chinook salmon released from various Snake River hatcheries in 1997, survival to Lower Granite dam was generally much lower then it has been in the previous four years in which data were collected.

• Once they passed Lower Granite, these fish survived at a comparable rate to the yearling chinook observed in previous years of research.

• For PIT-tagged hatchery steelhead, survival rates to various projects in the Lower Snake were generally comparable to the survival rates observed during the last three years of research; however, in 1997, survival from Lower Granite to McNary dams was higher than it was in 1995 or 1996. This could be attributable to lower dissolved gas levels below Ice Harbor dam in 1997.

• Moving on to flow/survival data for PIT-tagged yearling chinook salmon, Smith said estimated per-project survival for every year this research has been conducted in the 1990s was higher, for a given flow level, then the per-project survivals collected during the 1970s. One theory about the reasons for this discrepancy suggests that improvements made to fish passage facilities at the Lower Snake dams are responsible.

What does this data tell us? asked Stelle. First, that survivals at a given flow level are higher in the 1990s than they were in the 1970s, Smith replied. Second, much of our current flow-based management and modeling is based on the curve from the 1970s -- those data are 20 or more years old, and a lot has changed in the Snake River system since then. And has this data been peer-reviewed? asked Stelle. Yes, extensively, replied Smith -- the Council reviewed it only last year, and the bottom line was that they said this is the best science that can be done.

Am I reading this correctly if I say that, based on your 1993 to 1997 numbers, the difference in per-project survival is only 2% to 5% between flows of 70 Kcfs and 180 Kcfs? asked DeWitt Moss of the North Side Canal Company. Yes, Smith replied.

Moving on, Smith provided information on flow exposure experience vs. travel time for groups of steelhead in the Lower Granite to Lower Monumental reach in the years 1994-1997 (please see Enclosure G for a details). What these graphs show, said Smith, is that, for the years 1994 through 1997, there is a consistent relationship between flow exposure and travel time -- as flow increases, travel time decreases.

We also have some 1994-1997 information on flow exposure experience vs. estimated survival from Lower Granite tailrace to Lower Monumental tailrace for steelhead, Smith continued. This information is less conclusive -- in one year, as flow increased, so did survival; in another year, as flow increased, survival decreased; in two of the years, as flow increased, estimated survival stayed flat. Overall, what we have is an inconsistent picture -- we haven't seen a strong relationship within a year between flow and survival.

I'm struggling to understand how, if there is no strong relationship within a year between flow and survival, there *is* a relationship between years between flow survival, said Field. After all,

the fish only go downriver in a single year, and are subjected to certain exposures from environmental factors. I guess the real question is, is it valid to use year-to-year comparisons? Field said. I guess the best answer to your question is that there may be competing hypotheses there, said Smith. The bottom line is, what we see from some of this information is contradictions, said Brown. It is a contradiction that we see a relatively strong within-season response between flow and travel time within those reaches, but that we do not see a commensurate response between flow and survival. There are also differences, as Mike observed, within a year and between years.

If you know that within a year -- and it doesn't matter if it is a high-flow year or a low-flow year -- that there is no relationship between flow and survival, I don't see how you can compare the data points for those fish from year to year, said Field. At the same time, said Brown, you don't know that within a year there is no relationship. You just told us that, within a year, there is no relationship, said Field. Given the assumption that the 48 groups that left on 48 consecutive days were discrete and separate data points, said Brown. However, they are not discrete and separate data points.

This is getting extremely complicated, said Smith, but basically, the problem that Brian is talking about makes it more difficult to find a survival relationship if one does, in fact, exist. We will be spending a lot of time this winter trying to address that problem.

One observation, said Field -- what I see in the year-to-year comparison is that, once flows reach 90 Kcfs, we didn't see a lot of change in survival. Below 90 Kcfs, there seemed to be a relationship, but above 90 Kcfs, the survival was consistently about the same. I think that's accurate, said Smith. From the perspective of a take-home message, said Brown, this information is still being sorted out among the experts of the various agencies and tribes, and we don't have, at this point, a clear answer to what is a very important question for this group.

Are you comfortable with the idea that people are drawing inferences about the flow/survival relationship for the entire system based on studies of the reach from Lower Granite to Lower Monumental? asked Cooney. I understand that concern, Smith replied, and as a statistician, I am uncomfortable with this being extrapolated in that way -- everything that we will write up will make that distinction clear.

I should add that some of the survival estimates that are coming out of this study are feeding into the decision process that Ed Sheets talked about this morning, said Brown. Also, the John Day PIT-tag sampler will be on the-line in 1998, which gives us a longer reach over which to make these estimates. Cooney added that there is now a coordinated PIT-tagging program for spring chinook in the Mid-Columbia and the lower river, which will expand the data base for future years.

5. Sturgeon Operations. Prior to this presentation, Cohen said the Council supports the facilitation proposal, and added that, in her opinion, if it would be useful for the Executive Committee to take up some of the operational issues, such as Upper Snake water delivery and 1998 transport operations.

Bob Hallock provided an overview of the Fish and Wildlife Service's sturgeon operations in 1997, as well as some tentative recommendations for 1998. Among the highlights of his

presentation:

• Two sturgeon "pulses" were released from Libby Dam in 1997, the first in early June, and the second in late July. The biological response to the sturgeon pulses was positive, with some radio-tagged spawners moving as much as 30 kilometers overnight. Eggs were collected as far upstream as river kilometer 239, just below Bonners Ferry, Hallock said, so we know there was spawning somewhere above that point.

• One larvae was found in 1997, the first we've found in recent times, Hallock said. We also found a wild fish that was positively aged as BY'95. This means we are beginning to see some positive response to our efforts, and there is reason for optimism, Hallock said.

• Moving on to recommendations for 1998, Hallock said it is anticipated that flow volume in the Libby basin will be similar to the volume observed in 1997 -- about 1.7 MAF. We plan to concentrate next year's sturgeon pulses on water temperatures 10 degrees C and 12 degrees C. Using the selective withdrawal system at the project, we plan to move the sturgeon flow releases earlier into the season, he said. We will also look into potential opportunities for load following, he added.

To add a couple of things to Bob's presentation, said Brown, NMFS is planning to conduct a consultation on the FCRPS as a result of the steelhead listing. One of the issues in that listing is flows for steelhead in the Mid-Columbia, and how those will mesh with the sturgeon operation; it appears that those two operations will be complementary. Also, the Kootenai Lake board of control has made a preliminary finding that it may be possible to increase the lake elevation. If that finding is approved by the International Joint Commission, that would have advantages for sturgeon, because it would back water up into the Bonners Ferry reach; if that additional water was held into July, it could provide an additional volume for summer flow augmentation. We will be talking about that issue further at the IT level, said Brown. Funding has also been authorized for the installation of additional turbine units at Libby Dam; although no schedule has been set for this work, once installed, they will provide immediate benefits in terms of increased hydraulic capacity, greater operational flexibility, increased refill probability and power generation. Is that something we should be discussing at the System Configuration Team level? asked Fred Olney. I'm not familiar enough with the authorization to be able to tell you whether that was authorized as a fish and wildlife project, or a power project, Brown replied - that would be the distinction.

6. Economic Impacts of 1997 Operations. Brown distributed Enclosure J, a BPA document titled "Cost/Revenue Effects of Implementing the Biological Opinion in 1997." Basically, he said, final 1997 cost estimates are still being worked on, and we will hear a more complete report on this issue at a future Executive Committee meeting.

B. Key Issues for 1997.

1. Transport Operations. This agenda item is addressed later in today's meeting.

2. Snake River Water Delivery. Ron McKown of the Bureau of Reclamation began his presentation on Snake River water delivery in 1997 by saying that the State of Idaho allows the Bureau to provide 427 KAF of Upper Snake water for summer flow augmentation for salmon. In

1997, McKown said, the Bureau provided 427 KAF of flow augmentation water for salmon. The second point I wanted to make is related to an issue that arose in 1997, he continued -- I want everyone to understand that there is no flood control water from storage available Idaho until after the irrigation season is over in mid-October.

McKown distributed Enclosure K, a memorandum for the record from the Bureau of Reclamation on the subject of 1997 release and shaping of water from Reclamation's Upper Snake projects. Please see this document for details of McKown's presentation.

1997 was an interesting year in the Snake, McKown said. As all of you are aware, it was a tremendous runoff year; it was also a very cool summer, which caused some of the storage reservoirs to fill and refill, rather than being steadily drafted by irrigation withdrawals. The problem with that is the fact that we have some flood control requirements that normally are taken care of through those irrigation diversions -- that didn't occur this year, McKown said, and that provided us an opportunity to release some of our storage water prior to October 15.

The Bureau received requests from more than one group of asking us to release that water early, McKown continued. One of those requests was to provide space to accommodate erosion work at American Falls reservoir. The other request was from the salmon managers, who asked us to provide some of the water for fish in August and September. Reclamation worked with the affected in water users in Idaho to initiate a flood control draft, such that flows at Miller were increased to 5.6 Kcfs by August 17. After August 30, flows were increased further, to between 6 Kcfs and 7 Kcfs below Milner. The resulting August average flow of 3.9 Kcfs at Milner was the highest since 1909.

The shaping of Snake River flow at Brownlee reservoir was also an issue in 1997, said Brown -- the issue was basically the degree to which shaping, rather than pass-through, is used at that project. In 1997, there were questions about the amount of Upper Snake water that was shaped at Brownlee, as well as the fact that some of the additional flow at Milner to which Ron has been referring could have been passed through Brownlee to help meet the flow of target at Lower Granite Dam during the last two weeks of August, when we were about 15 Kcfs below the target. That didn't happen in 1997, Brown said, and there is interest in exploring how we might be able to improve management when we have opportunities like that in the future. The State of Idaho and Reclamation both worked hard to get that water released, said McKown, but it didn't happen.

The situation this summer was also an opportunity to provide some relief to Montana reservoirs, said Field; however, for some reason, the salmon managers did not want to grant that relief to Montana -- at least, that was our perspective. Then negotiations broke down between Idaho Power Company and BPA on the question of reimbursement for lost generation. Granted, this situation may never again arise during our lifetime, but I think we should make an effort to put together a plan which will allow us to take advantage of similar opportunities in the future, should they occur, said Field.

And that, essentially, is the policy issue we will be discussing at the IT level, said Brown -- where there are opportunities like that which are a function of Upper Snake operations, and there may be some water available over and above the 427 KAF, how can we capitalize on those opportunities? The second policy question is, what is the role of TMT in determining how we should operate? I would like to see the IT take those questions up, said Field, and to see what can

be worked out, while being respectful of the interests of the people who own the water rights in the Upper Snake. People in Idaho are willing to help, he continued, but they do not want their rights to be abused, any more than anyone else does. However, the bottom line for 1997 is that, we did have some opportunities, and we let those opportunities slip away, McKown observed.

C. Consultation Process on Snake and Columbia River Steelhead.

In October 1997, NMFS listed Upper Columbia steelhead as endangered and Snake River steelhead as threatened, said Brown. We are now in the early stages of consultation with the federal operators. The steelhead Biological Assessment is due out in mid-December; once that document is available, we hope to complete consultations relatively quickly, such that we can produce a steelhead Biological Opinion for regional review by mid-February. We hope to conclude the consultation process by mid-March, said Brown, so that everything is in place prior to the 1998 migration season.

The main issues to be resolved include, first, scope, said Brown -- how does the steelhead listing effect some of the longer-term things we are working on through PATH? We don't feel that it would be productive to interrupt the flow of the PATH analyses to redirect that effort into an assessment of steelhead long-term requirements.

There is also an operational issue, which has to do with flow, Brown continued. Based on the data we've collected so far, we don't think it will be necessary to tinker with flows in the Snake or Lower Columbia Rivers. In the Mid-Columbia, however, there is an issue -- at the moment, flow targets are set only for Lower Granite and McNary dams, and flows at Priest Rapids Dam are whatever is needed in order to meet the McNary flow target. As Snake River flows begin to rise in the early spring, Mid-Columbia flows are often curtailed to reduce spill or to store water for later in the season, which can adversely affect migrating steelhead.

We are looking now at what kind of seasonal flow target we may want to set for steelhead at Priest Rapids, said Brown; the issue there is, where is that water going to come from? Do we use water that would otherwise be stored for use during the summer period, resulting either in reduced flows later in the season or in deeper drafts of the storage reservoirs? Or should it come from water stored during the winter period, which will adversely impact power operations? This will be sorted out during the consultation process, Brown said.

There is also a transportation issue, he continued -- the listing of these two additional stocks raises questions about transport operations, particularly at McNary. Under the 1995 BiOp, transportation at McNary was eliminated. That means that none of the Upper Columbia steelhead are being transported. If we resume transportation at McNary, that will raise the overall percentage of fish that are transported within the season, and that is another issue that needs to be sorted out in the consultation process.

As far as the overall approach to transportation in 1998, Brown said NMFS is currently working on a strawman proposal, which should be available for review by early December. The IT has also formulated a question for the ISAB on the underlying science behind the transportation program; we will be asking the ISAB to provide an answer to this question by February, so that there will the time for dispute resolution on actual operation.

So to sum up, the principal issues to be dealt with during the steelhead consultations are transport at McNary and Mid-Columbia flows; in terms of timing, the steelhead Biological Assessment should be available for regional review by Mid-December, and we hope to conclude the consultation process prior to the 1998 migration season, Brown said.

Has the IT discussed what kind of dispute resolution process might take place in the February/March time period? asked Stelle. No, Brown replied.

This morning, said Pat Ford, you told me it is not NMFS's intent to reopen the 1995 Biological Opinion. I'm trying to understand the relationship between the steelhead consultation and the present Biological Opinion, he continued, because it seems to me that, given the fact that the possibility of resuming transportation at McNary is a part of those consultations, and that is something that is specifically eliminated by the 1995 BiOp, that that would constitute a reopening of the 1995 Opinion. Am I wrong about that? asked Ford.

My guess is that we will be doing a new Biological Opinion on the operation of the FCRPS, warranted by the effective date of a final listing for steelhead, Stelle said. That Biological Opinion is later in time than the 1995 Biological Opinion, and therefore, the new Biological Opinion will control operations. Technically, this is not a reopening of the 1995 BiOp-- it is a new Biological Opinion on the proposed operation of FCRPS in 1998 and beyond. My expectation is that the new Biological Opinion will incorporate or leave unchanged the vast majority of the recommendations and measures in the 1995 Biological Opinion, Stelle said, and will only modify it in the areas Brian outlined. So in direct answer to your question of whether or not this constitutes a reopening of the 1995 BiOp, the answer is no, Stelle said. In answer to the question of whether or not this will provide an opportunity to make changes to the recommendations in that older Opinion, the answer is yes.

Have there been any discussions to date with the fishery agencies and tribes with regard to the scope of the steelhead Biological Opinion? Ford asked. If not, will there be an opportunity for the public to provide input on that question? Consultations with the other agencies and tribes have occurred primarily through discussions at the IT level, Brown replied, and through the CBFWA anadromous fish caucus.

And what about the mechanism for public input on scope? Ford asked -- should we be writing letters to NMFS? People are welcome to write letters, Stelle replied; in addition, the meetings of the Implementation Team and the CBFWA meetings are open to the public, and provide further opportunity for public participants to find out what is going on, and to voice their opinions.

One final question, said Ford -- did you look specifically at the issue of whether, due to the steelhead listings, it might make sense, in the new Biological Opinion, to look at the relative failure, during the period of the current BiOp, to meet flow and spill targets? Are you talking about modifying the flow objectives contained in the 1995 Biological Opinion, or about making adjustments in implementation activities to better meet those objectives? Stelle asked. The latter, Ford replied. The current BiOp acknowledges that the water volumes that are provided are insufficient to meet the targets under all conditions, Brown replied. However, in the 1995 BiOp, we concluded that, despite that fact, there was sufficient interim improvement to give us an adequate probability of survival and recovery, provided that we make a timely 1999 decision on long-term system configuration. I don't see the steelhead listings changing that conclusion,

Brown said.

From the standpoint of the fishing and conservation groups I represent, said Ford, I think you will encounter substantial opposition to the idea of commencing transportation at McNary. Second, we support the idea that there are no changes contemplated to the BiOp spill program in the Snake River; in our view, that spill regime has been the most significant achievement of the Biological Opinion, and should not be modified. Third, there are a number of groups who would like NMFS to explore whether or not there may be potential to better meet the flow targets established in the current Biological Opinion.

IV. Decision Item: IT Recommendation Regarding Regional Forum Facilitation.

John Palensky of NMFS distributed enclosures L and M, which provide a detailed overview of the Regional Forum facilitation issue, the contemplated scope of work, level of effort and costs associated with hiring a facilitation contractor (please see these documents for details of Palensky's presentation). Palensky explained that the Northwest Power Planning Council has approved the use of $80,000 in ESA funding for a facilitation contract covering the remainder of this operating year; what we are after today is Executive Committee approval to proceed, and to ask BPA to issue a request for proposals, he explained. We would also like to spend a few minutes discussing a process for the selection of the facilitation contractor.

After some minutes of discussion, Stelle expressed his support for the facilitation proposal as outlined; the proposal was carried without objection, and the Executive Committee recommended that BPA proceed with issuing its request for proposals. In terms of next steps, Palensky said a panel, consisting of volunteers from the IT and the other Regional Forum teams, will be convened to screen the applicants and produce a "short list" of qualified candidates. After that, he said, what we have discussed is putting together an interview panel that will recommend a finalist to BPA. If the process goes according to plan, the facilitator could be on board as soon as mid- February, in time to facilitate the next Executive Committee meeting.

V. Next Executive Committee Meeting Date and Agenda Items.

The next Executive Committee meeting was set for Thursday, February 19, time and location t.b.a. Meeting notes prepared by Jeff Kuechle, BPA contractor.